

Employment Supports

Real Work for People with Disabilities

Number of Maine people
with mental illness who
are employed:

1999 308

2000 367

Number of Maine people
with mental retardation
who are employed:

1999 860

2000 990

Source: ME Department
of Labor, Division of
Vocational Rehabilitation

*"I feel supported at
work and well
connected to my
friends and my
family."*

- Consumer
Comment

People who have jobs that pay livable wages and include medical, as well as other benefits are far less dependent on public programs for support.

The Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services (BDS) believes that decreased dependency facilitates achievement of more inclusive and full lives in the communities within which people live and work. Self-esteem, morale and overall life satisfaction improve when a person is employed.

In the past, there have been powerful disincentives for people with disabilities to become employed. As these disincentives are modified and as the business need for untapped labor pools increases, far more opportunities will be available for people supported by BDS.

Maine is positioning its public resources to create more opportunity for people with disabilities to become more self-sufficient, and the number of people working is increasing. With a more intense focus,

our goal is that the number continue to grow each year.

This work builds upon a national reform agenda. The system of supports for people with disabilities has undergone radical change in the past several years. Major Social Security reform is making it easier for people with disabilities to go to work while maintaining critical benefits such as Medicaid (through the Medicaid Buy-In Program, otherwise known in Maine as the Worker's Option Program) and continuing to receive some Social Security benefits (the proposed Ticket to Work Program). BDS works to promote work and career as a focus of services that foster community integration.

An audit of vocational supports offered by BDS recommended areas of focus to better facilitate employment for people who want to go to work.

As a result BDS adopted a vocational policy that sets the direction for the development of new vocational services and encourages the conversion of segregated

employment settings to integrated, competitive settings. BDS is positioning its resources to the extent possible to continue shifting vocational services in this direction.

Work has begun to develop an implementation plan around workforce development with BDS Mental Retardation and Mental Health Services. Planning with BDS Children's Services and other agencies for young people coming out of school will result in a solid plan for increasing employment opportunities for young people with disabilities. This, coupled with more flexible benefit options will provide better opportunities for self-sufficiency and reduced dependence on social services.

BDS also is in collaboration with the Department of Human Services and the Department of Labor in order to build compatible service delivery systems and goals.

Creating the opportunity for businesses to provide leadership, share their experience and knowledge and promote best practices is key



State of Maine
Department of Behavioral
and Developmental Services

Lynn F. Duby, Commissioner

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to supporting opportunities for people who want to work. A new initiative by BDS in partnership with Maine Businesses for Social Responsibility will provide information and education to businesses through newsletter articles and other sponsored events.

BDS also has a very strong partnership with community agencies as well as consumers. A “Best Practices Conference” was held in November, 2000, to bring the latest information about vocational policy and practice to Department staff, community agencies and consumers. Current efforts include regular training events, as well as technical assistance to agencies that wish to pursue community based employment options.

Other system improvements include the development of an employment specialist curriculum to assure that job developers and job coaches have appropriate job knowledge and skills training .

BDS offers funding for supporting consumers in employment through the Mental Health Long-Term Support Program and in Mental Retardation Services through several sources. Services are available only to the extent that funds exist. One of the ways that people with mental illness and mental retardation are supported in employment is through the services of a job coach. Job coaches can be a business peer, a supervisor or a staff person from a community agency. Training and supports

are provided onsite by either the employer or brought into the work setting by an external agency. BDS is encouraging, through its vocational policy, that work occur in a competitive work environment where the employer is the business.

While many people will be employed without additional supports, there are some who require more assistance in order to learn the job requirements.

For more information about BDS visit: www.state.me.us/bds/